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ON MY MIND**A. M. Rosenthal**

Are They More Than Contras?

MIAMI

Six months, not much more. The political men here who represent Nicaraguan rebel troops in the field disagree about a lot of things. But they do say, quite separately, that they have about six months to show whether they can change from a collection of competing groups into a unified movement capable of challenging Sandinista control of their country.

The people they are trying to show are Americans, members of Congress. The Nicaraguan rebels are not ashamed of it.

To them, reality is that the Sandinistas depend on Soviet funding and arms and they on American. They know they have been hurt hard by the belief in the United States that Oliver North gave them money from the profits of peddling arms to Iran. They all insist they never got the money from the Iranian deal.

If they had, they would not have regarded it as sinful. Tracking down the source of money from abroad was not one of their top priorities.

"When you are dying of thirst and somebody gives you a drink, you don't ask if it's Schweppes or Perrier."

That's a favorite saying of Adolfo Calero, a big, burly man who resigned recently from the three-man rebel political directorate. It was part of complex political struggles he hopes will broaden the directorate and bring him back, possibly at the top. He said he had just assumed that if the President of the United States wanted to fight the Sandinistas Mr. Reagan would have access to funds. Public funding was best but if it had to be private or secret, that was not a great concern compared with survival.

But the rebel leaders know Americans do care and that getting the Congressional funding that is life or death to them is now vastly more difficult.

Arturo Cruz, a former member of the Sandinista junta and now a rebel leader, made a weary attempt at figuring out the odds. "On a scale of one to one hundred, what would you say?" he asked, and answered himself. "I would say five."

Some of the rebel political leaders in Miami were part of the struggle against the dictator Somoza but did not trust the Sandinistas from the beginning. Mr. Calero was one of those, proud of it, and may have the biggest rebel following.

Then there are men like Mr. Cruz, a banker in the Somoza days. He fought the dictator until Somoza was overthrown in 1979. Mr. Cruz believed the Sandinistas would preserve the variety within the revolutionary movement that defeated Somoza and of which the Sandinistas were part. He joined the first Sandinista junta.

He campaigned for them among businessmen in Nicaragua and abroad until he decided the Sandinistas were not interested in democratic variety but Marxism without any variety at all. He seems tired now and says all he wants to do is get out as soon as possible and write a book.

Further left, are men like Alfredo César. We talked in a Miami coffee shop and realized we had met before — five years ago in Managua. He had been with the Sandinistas through the fight against Somoza and by then, in his mid-30's, he was president of the

Time to show is running short in Miami.

Central Bank, sending foreigners away full of admiration for Sandinista talent. He got out, convinced the Sandinistas had betrayed the revolution against one dictatorship to build another.

Now he fights the Sandinistas not only in Miami and in Central America but at meetings of European and third world Socialists, where he and Sandinistas sit stonily near each other.

Quite different men. What unites them is the conviction they are not counterrevolutionaries — "contras," originally a Sandinista epithet — but a movement carrying out its own revolution against a group that captured a national triumph over Somoza as Castro swallowed the anti-Batista victory and Lenin's Bolsheviks seized the revolt against the czars.

James LeMoyné's carefully reported, sensitive accounts in The Times of rebel troops inside Nicaragua indicate growing self-confidence and skill. In Miami, the political representatives of those troops know that most Americans regard their movement with distaste or contempt and believe it is splintered, infected with Somocistas, C.I.A.-controlled and incapable of bringing anything but bloodshed to Nicaragua.

As long as so many Americans regard them as ragtag and tainted, the rebel movement seems doomed. Its leaders say that to persuade Congress otherwise, they have to unite militarily, choose a coherent political leadership and become strong enough either to fight effectively or negotiate effectively.

There is division on which should come first. There is no division about the fact that there is very little time to persuade Congress they are members of a new Nicaraguan revolution, not just contras. □